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The Space of Art In The Digital Age

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THE SPACE OF ART IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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N9006

BY ELLIE ISAACS

I have written this article with the aim of submitting it to Triple Canopy.
Triple Canopy accepts year round proposals – (This article is my finished piece, however, if and when I am to submit it, only a detailed proposal is required). Triple Canopy would be a great platform for my article because it fits perfectly within their research project category. The questions that I am tackling within my article are extremely relevant and will bode well with many of the other topics frequently discussed within the magazine. A significant feature of the publication is that it encompasses digital works of art - this in itself would act as an extension of my article. Triple Canopy is geared to a slightly more academic writing style in comparison to a great deal of similar publications. Although I expect my article to engage with a wide audience, I expect that the majority of readers will come from a perspective of knowledge and interest in this specific topic.

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The Space of Art In the Digital Age

"Nothing disappears completely ... In space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows ... Pre-existing space underpins not only durable spatial arrangements, but also representational spaces and their attendant imagery and mythic narratives[1]."

- Henri Lefebvre

Space And The Object

When did the concept of "the space of art," come into question? And by space, I am referring to the much-debated notion of spatiality.

[1] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Editions Anthropos, 1991), 230

Spatiality – of or relating to space/existing or occurring in space; having extension in space. ORIGIN mid 19th cen.: from Latin spatium 'space'[2]

I plan to delve into this weighty matter, drawing focus on the construction of virtual spaces in order to investigate the possibility of a consequential collapse in real space. In other words, I want to figure out whether the development of virtual spaces will render the physicality of art as progressively obsolete. I shall do so by concentrating on two key aspects: the first being the social experience of these modes of artistic practice, and the second being public and private spheres and the resulting inversion of their conditions.

There are a number of ways that one can define space – first and foremost, it can be considered as a mathematical term - a set of elements or systems. It is strange to think that not so many years ago, the notion of 'space' had a solely geometrical definition. The problematic nature of the relationship between mathematics and reality led to a realisation that space is also imbued with a philosophical disposition. Mathematicians paradoxical rendering of space was unable to withstand its innumerable dimensions that are clearly in existence. The likes of Henri Lefebvre, Michael Foucault and Gaston Bachelard, had been cogitating on the complex concept throughout the twentieth century. Foucault sheds light on the various spheres of space, the 'theoretical (epistemological) realm and the practical one, between mental and social[3],' yet he evades bridging the gap between them. This inability to come to a consensus has somewhat stretched the

[2] "Spatiality," Dictionary.com, accessed December 4, 2016, http://www.dictionary.com/browse/spatiality
[3] *The Production of Space*, 4

notion to a state of infinitude. Space has the ability to operate on all planes as well as the interconnections between them.

We have all heard and said that saying, "I need some space," but do we ever stop to think about the infinite possibilities that are borne from this commonplace statement? – Probably not. Author, Peter Merriman, describes 'the multiplicitous and heterogeneous nature of space and spatiality – as abstract and concrete, produced and producing, imagined and materialized, structured and lived, relational, relative and absolute[4].' This for me perfectly epitomises the protean nature of space and its ability to bring the unconscious into the open.

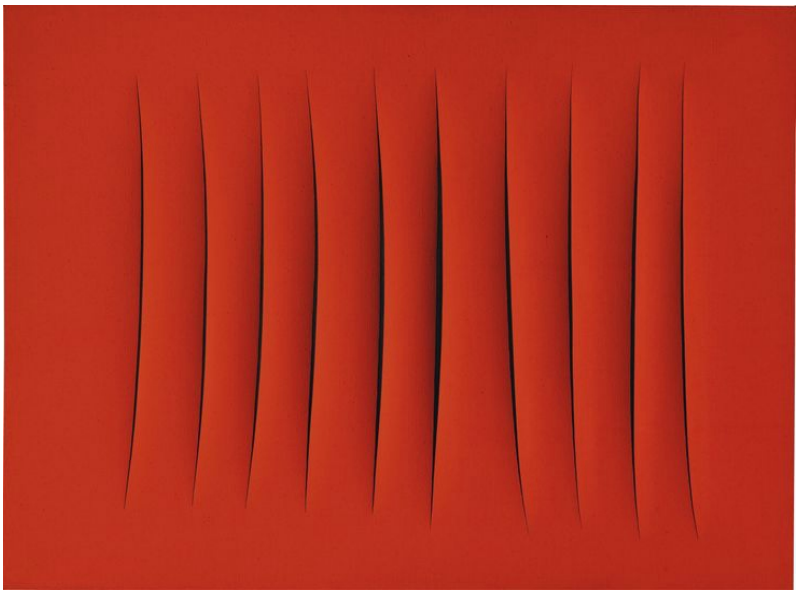
Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel Ceiling, 1508-1512, fresco

Without wishing to dwell on the timeline of space's artistic origins, it is interesting to consider the point at which artists were overtly tackling the idea. The tension between surface and illusionistic space became apparent in the first half of the fifteenth century. Flatness was snubbed and the spatial distinctions between objects and figures became a measure of a painting's success – the more

[4] Peter Merriman and Martin Jones, "Space and spatiality in theory," *Dialogues in Human Geography* 2(I) (2012): 4, accessed December 2, 2016, DOI: 10.1177/2043820611434864 dhg.sagepub.com

illusion, the better. This perhaps marks the point when space **in** art was given recognition- it was an abstract concept that had the ability of expressing cultural and religious ideas, and thus, it was given a position of importance. This served as a catalyst for the new approach to space and light in painting.

Fast-forwarding to the twentieth century, 1947 to be precise, Italian artist Lucio Fontana began to embrace the "Movimento Spaziale,"otherwise known as the Spatialist Movement. His subsequent works, all of which were rendered with the generic title, *Concetto Spaziale,* demonstrated a piercing and later slashing of the canvas. His intention was to generate an entirely new dimension of space. This idea then progressed into sculpture – extending these previously unexplored realms even further. This segment of his work suggests a drive towards "dematerialization."



Lucio Fontana, *Concetto Spaziale, Atesse,* 1964

'Space is understood through both 'a progressivist and primitivist sense of presence and access, while equally implying contradictory suggestions of the impossibility of presence; there are both spaces that are formerly mysterious, now known and explored… and the still unknown spaces of the cosmos, which we want to approach as fact of intuition and mystery, typical of art as divination[5].'

- Jaleh Mansoor (on *Concetto Spaziale*)

Despite Fontana's modest embrace of dematerialisation, his work has an undeniable investment in its materiality; nonetheless, it looks ahead to Conceptualist practices postdating Minimalism. In my journey towards virtual territories, Lucy Lippard's argument is paramount to the evolution of the art object and its evolving spatial characteristics. Conceptual art demands more participation on the behalf of the viewer- if we consider Lippard's argument as a means of mapping out the disintegration of traditional media, it may aid in our explanation of the progressive tendency towards performance, electronics, light and sound. Lippard stressed how viewer identification has become a vital component in our interactions with artwork - the social relationship that is constructed between the viewer and the detached object, is comparable to our exchange with detached spaces or digital worlds.

In my exploration of digital-media that consciously employs the aesthetics and systems of databases, I want to gauge both the negative and positive outcomes

[5] Jaleh Mansoor, "Fontana's Atomic Age Abstraction: The Spatial Concepts and the Television Manifesto," *October* 124 (2008): 139, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40368504.

that have stemmed from this mode of artistic production. As aforementioned, an investigation of space will remain my primary concern, however, there are a few other questions that I wish to confront along the way:

What constitutes a work of virtual art?

What are the social implications of this medium?

Why are we so susceptible to its effects?

What is the future for virtual art?

An Introduction to Virtual Space

(Space, outside ourselves, invades and ravishes things:

If you want to achieve the existence of a tree,

Invest it with inner space, this space

That has its being in you, Surround it with compulsions,

It knows no bounds, and only really becomes a tree

If it takes its place in the heart of your renunciation.)[6]

-Rainer Maria Rilke

Bachelard refers to Rilke's poem in his text, *The Poetics of Space.* The poem calls to this idea of investing in the limitations of outside space. In order to grow, the tree needs to inherit the intimate space of the dreamer.

[6] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look At How We Experience Intimate Spaces* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 200

Previous to engaging with works of a virtual nature, it is important to tie some of the characteristics of this output to their philosophical roots. You may consider these concepts to be outdated - I disagree, I believe many of the themes explored during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continue to honor their applicability. Bachelard's work reminds us that we do not live in a homogenous space; he considers the internal spaces of our psyche, our imagination and our desires (this may aid in later untangling our affinity for virtual spaces). On the other hand, Foucault's examination of the epoch of space embeds the notion within the external – this is perhaps of primary significance when considering virtual practices. He divides space into two main categories, "utopias" and "heterotopias[7]." Foucault describes utopias as 'sites with no real place[8],' they represent an inversion of society - they are idealistic dreamlands. Heterotopias stem from these utopias, they act as an extension of those realms - the main difference being that they are localizable, embedded within culture. Heterotopias continue to exist outside of normative places; however, our ability to indicate these zones within reality is what differentiates them from their utopian counterpart. Foucault uses the "mirror" as a metaphor to interpret the site between the utopia and heterotopia, the site where both spaces are able to coexist. When you stand before a mirror, confronting your reflection, you are able to see yourself in a space that you do not actually exist – 'I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface[9].'

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[7] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," in *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* (October, 1984), accessed November 23, 2016, web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf

[8] "Of Other Spaces," 3-5

[9] "Of Other Spaces," 4

There is no denying that these ideas are both vague and highly perplexing. The reason I am mapping out these complex systems is because it is very possible that works of virtual art enable us to inhabit the dual-criterion of the mirror, where our presence is both real and unreal at the same time.

What constitutes a work of virtual art? – For me, this has always been a rather tricky concept to grasp, especially because virtual reality lacks any kind of comprehensive history. I am prone to categorizing the practice as a product of Internet Art that either stays in the dominion of the web, or is realized as a digital manifestation that occupies a space within the real world. The term 'digital art' still resides in a state of limbo; nevertheless, this art form laid the foundations for virtual reality as a core medium of the ever evolving "information society." The computer has transformed the 'image' and now suggests that it is possible to enter it – this transformation has developed alongside new techniques of distribution and presentation. Virtual reality poses a historically accelerated moment in which we live, the parameters of time and space are modifiable and the resultant mixed-realities make it difficult to distinguish between the original and the simulacrum.

I do not wish to limit my investigation solely to immersive configurations that exist within the museum setting; virtual art takes into consideration the virtualization of art made with technical media, thus the Internet is home to the majority of this output. It is easy to overlook the fact that the Internet is a physical thing, 'It is a 'space' mapped out over material space – as Hito Steyerl

once pointed out, it is a '…realm of complexity gone haywire.[10]' Humans shape the space of the Internet collectively – we have the ability to construct realms that we would want to inhabit in real life, and in this way, the Internet is self-progressive, organic and malleable.

American computer artist, Myron Krueger, is considered to be one the first generation virtual and augmented reality researchers. Having originally trained as a computer scientist, Krueger implemented the computer as the central component in his practice[11]. Largely influenced by John Cage's experiments with audience participation, Krueger created works that were able to respond to the movement of the viewer. These "responsive environments" reacted to the gestures of the audience through a means of interpretation and anticipation.

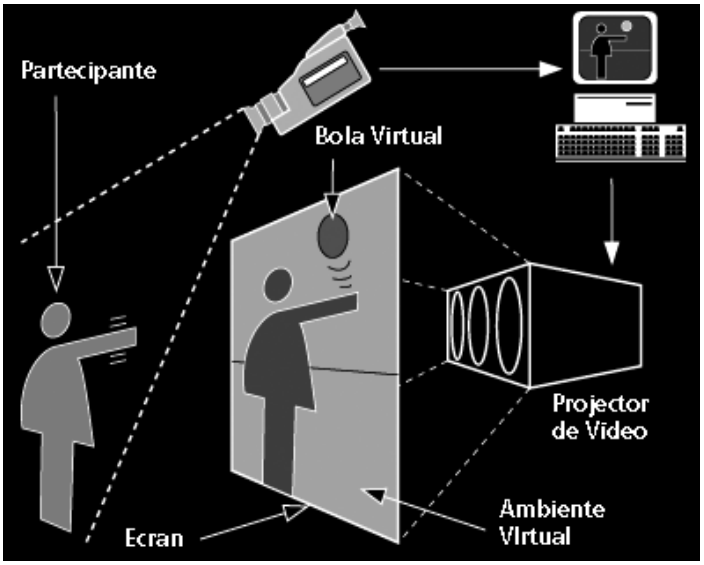
"The responsive environment has been presented as the basis for a new aesthetic medium based on real-time interaction between men and machines. In the long range it augurs a new realm of human experience, artificial realities which seek not to stimulate the physical world but to define arbitrary, abstract and otherwise impossible relationships between action and result[12]"

Krueger found that he was not so much concerned with the technical elements of the computer; rather he was struck by a far more personal outlook. He had harbored feelings of resentment due to the fact that he was forced to sit down in order to interact with this kind of technology; he felt the computer denied that

[10] Omar Kholief, *You Are Here, Art After The Internet* (Cornerhouse Publications, 2013), 129
[11] Randall Packer and Ken Jordan, *Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality* (W. W. Norton & Company; 1 edition, 2002) 105
[12] *Multimedia,* 104

he had a body of any kind and came to the realization that the interface between himself and the screen was purely perceptual and symbolic. He wanted to communicate the essence of a computer and allow us to experience it from a far more physical point of view. At the heart of Krueger's breakthrough, stemming from the above-mentioned provocations, is the recognition of ones natural desire to identify with the image on the screen - people expect activity to occur on the monitor as it does in the real world.

In 1974 the *Videoplace* system was underway. During its primary stages, the computer could see you; it could define your edges, yet, it could only respond in a limited number of ways. One of the main attractions was the juxtaposition of large and small and what is suggested emotionally by scale. People were getting together in a place of artificial reality, interacting in a way that humans never previously could. This provided an insight into an increasingly technological future. *Videoplace* was a means of visualizing scientific information and translating it into real time behaviors – the notion of "real time" is important because intelligence has always been a real time phenomenon.



Myron Kueger, *Videoplace,* 1974

In Krueger's quest to realize his conception of an artificial reality, he began to develop his own computer system in the years leading up to 1984. The concept of *Videoplace* is pretty simple; the work consists of two people in different rooms, each containing a projection screen and a video camera. The pairs were able to communicate through their projected images in this shared space on the screen[13]. 'Within the room, an 8' x 10' rear projection screen is utilized so that when a person enters, they are confronted with their own image as well as the images of those in the connected rooms. By moving about their respective rooms, interactions can occur between both of the users' images[14]'. The advanced nature of the system meant that live video images of visitors could be coherently combined with graphic images, using various programs to modify them. Today, *Videoplace* enables visitors to interact with twenty-five different programs that alter alongside the introduction of a new audience participator[15]. The user's image can be rotated, shrunk and colored – this manipulation of artificial space lends itself to a new capacity of control that is not feasible within the confines of everyday life. In this exchange between visitor and technology, response is the essential medium.

Works like *Videoplace* require the audience to cognitively and empathetically perceive the performing virtual body as something that is material. Steven Dixon, author of *Digital Performances* states, 'contrary to prevalent critical assumptions, we do not believe the performing virtual body is either less authentic than the live, nor is it disembodied from the performer… Artists

[13] Myron Krueger: Videoplace," Medien kunst Netz, accessed November 25, 2016 http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/videoplace/
[14] "Myron Krueger: Videoplace."
[15] "Myron Krueger: Videoplace."

explorations of the relationship between the virtual and the physical "help to combat the myth of disembodiment[16]."' The desire for the virtual to be perceived as visceral is perplexing, and for me somewhat foreboding. In this sense it would seem that cyberspace has the ability to redefine our existence and how we interact with one another. This brings me to my next topic of enquiry - the social experience.

The Social Experience

Videoplace and The Digital Double

As one of the earliest manifestations of virtual art, *Videoplace* provides an insight into some of the modes of social interaction that are generated by this medium. Lefebvre's idea of the mirror is explicitly invoked due to the way the digitally reflected image of an individual becomes an active force within the computer-generated context. The user is forced to question their own image and their relationship to the rest of the world is both scrutinized and transformed. At the heart of this particular interaction is the notion of the digital double. The consciousness of one's own duplication is intrinsic to a work like this one because it enhances the blur between imagination and reality. A dialogue is created amongst the self and the world beyond due to the instantaneous reflection of one's actions. Of course, with a work like *Videoplace,* it is clear that our image has been entirely digitized; we have an acute awareness that this reflection is a kind of fantasy clone; we are conscious of its presence yet we

[16] Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theatre, Dance, Performance Art and Installation* (London: The MIT Press, 2007), 215

cannot help but partially embody this virtual entity. In this way it poses almost as an alter ego.

'We dream of passing through ourselves and finding ourselves in the beyond: the day when your holographic double will be there in space, eventually moving and talking, you will have realised your dream[17].'

- Jean Baudrillard

The basis of Lefebvre's thesis demonstrates space as a social invention – 'Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology or politics. It has always been political and strategic. There is an ideology of space. Because space, which seems homogeneous, which appears as a whole in its objectivity, in its pure form, such as we determine it, is a social product[18].' According to Lefebvre, social space is produced through its encompassment of interrelationships and thus cannot be reduced to a simple object. For Lefebvre, social experience is able to engender space, this realm lies somewhere between nature and culture – it is a force that combines the genuine along with the artificial.

I am going to confront the topic of social space from two different perspectives:

1. The social implications of virtual art within the museum or gallery environment.

[17] *Digital performance,* 249
[18] *The Production Of Space*

2. The impact of the Internet (and its burgeoning online platforms) on our social experience and interactions.

Virtual Worlds – In The Gallery

Daniel Steegmann's work, *Phantom (Kingdom of all the animals and all the beasts is my name)* was created for the New Museum Triennial in 2015. The work invites participants to explore the landscape of Mata Atlántica rainforest in Southern Brazil via Oculus Rift. The pixelated rendering situates itself between the virtual and the real – the simulated environment becomes inhabitable and a union between the participant and the jungle is fostered through this virtual process. The work was created in collaboration with ScanLAB Projects using a 'FARO Focus3D laser scanner which was able to convert a fifteen hundred foot plot of land into an immersive record of the forest[19]. The phantasmagoric nature of the image collapses the gulf between representation and perception and we are provided with a novel insight into a manufactured snippet of the world. Although this work was considered to be an immaculate mathematical construction of reality, there were a number of disappointed users who relayed underwhelming accounts of the experience. The minimal, paired down, pointillist rendering of the forest may have been considered as somewhat anti-climatic. This calls to our preconceived enthusiasm regarding immersive experiences and suggests our lofty expectations when it comes to navigating virtual worlds.

[19] "Phantom (Kingdom of all the animals and all the beasts is my name," Daniel Steegmann, accessed 20 November, 2016 http://www.danielsteegmann.info/works/41/index.html

Daniel Steegmann, *Phantom (Kingdom of all the animals and all the beasts in my name),* 2015, New Museum Triennial
(Top): Participant wearing Oculus Rift headset, (Bottom): View from inside Oculus Rift

Phantom's three-dimensional documentation enables us to encounter the site from an entirely different location to its origin. The work evokes an image of a milieu in which everything is alive and sentient, but despite this, the Brazilian rainforest is actually one of the fastest disappearing environments in the world.

This is where the two spaces become entirely disparate, whilst in reality the forest continues to descend into a state of peril; the virtual rendering has the capacity to freeze a moment in time.

This model of virtual reality introduces a rather more isolated approach to art viewing within the museum. The user becomes a ghost within the machine - as participants navigate the space; they cannot see their feet - just the pixelated soil of the forest beneath them. The advanced sense of fully embodied immersion emphasizes a kind of Cartesian mind-body split, especially since the user's journey and experience is directly correlated to their head and body movements. The medium of immersive virtual reality is an amalgamation of both conceptual and physical space that stretches the notion to a realm without precedent. Within this space, an abstract construct of an existing locale assumes a three-dimensional embodiment which is subsequently explored through a means of full-body interaction. There is no other space outside of the virtual that is able to facilitate this kind of multidimensional encounter.

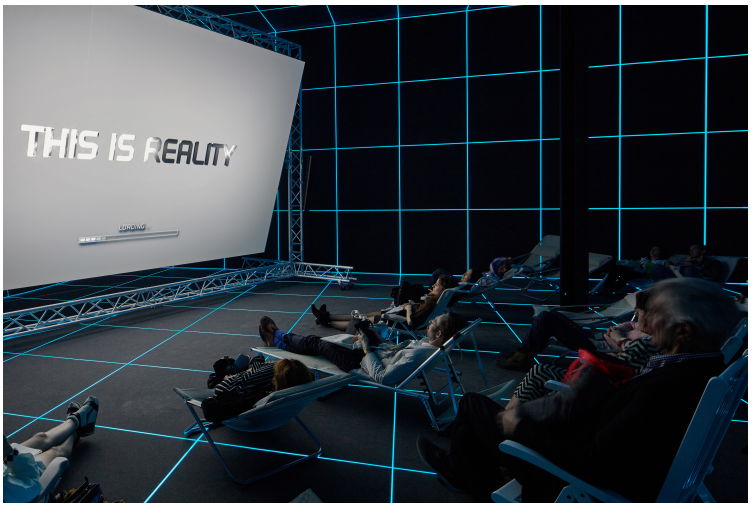
I am not suggesting that a work like *Phantom* is the only exemplification of virtual art within the museum. Another, far less self-contained example would be Hito Steyerl's *Factory of The Sun.* Having had the opportunity to see this work during its 2015 debut at the Venice Biennale, I am relatively familiar with the installation. The work is a 'meditation on lights, politics, gaming and ideology in a neo-liberal world where Germany is replaced by Deutsche Bank, protesters are killed on a daily basis, and the virtual labor of gaming has become a coercive kind

of work for the masses[20].' Steyerl's probing of the pleasures and pitfalls of image circulation engages with the current climate of unparalleled global data flow. The surreal narrative tells the story of workers whose forced movements are transformed into artificial sunlight. The room itself, which is equipped with luminous blue motifs, gives the impression that you are contained within a digital cube - visitors are welcome to take a seat on one of scattered deck chairs, sit back and fully absorb the environment. Deck chairs, which are usually associated with sunbathing, pose as ironic references to the digitization of sunlight and allude to a dystopian environment in which nature has been totally overdriven by artificiality. Although this experience is far less solitary in comparison to *Phantom,* the overwhelming characteristics of the installation renders all life within the room as insignificant. In a peculiar way, our fixation goads us into inhabiting what feels like a rather robotic disposition.

The gaming undercurrents of a work like *Factory of The Sun* can be equated to everyday videogames, thus the perceived social implications most likely overlap in some areas. Although standardized videogames are far more accessible, many of the underlying concepts are the same. Videogames are now considered as a familiar and valued form of leisure; moreover they have frequently been dubbed as a major cause of anti-social behavior. One of the sentiments that may derive from virtual gaming is the perception of control that is stimulated, particularly for younger players. This means of play has constructed alternative social spaces which have lead to the molding of a cultural phenomenon. *Factory of The Sun*

[20] "Game Art: Hito Steyerl's Factory of The Sun (2015)," Gamescenes. Art In The Age Of Videogames, accessed November 22, 2016, http://www.gamescenes.org/2015/06/game-art-hito-steyerls-factory-of-the-sun-2015.html

does not have such an obvious gaming element, but I see similarities in the depth of interactivity between the two fields. When it comes to videogames, the element of play is paramount to its pervasion of numerable interactive paradigms – a sense of play is equally fundamental in conversations with sensor-active environments[21]. Part of the success of the videogame is down to its dynamic visual, as opposed to textual, narrative. In the same way that videogames involve the fabrication of virtual and fantasy worlds, *Factory of The Sun* constructs these same qualities within the parameters of simulation. The theatrical nature of videogames is rooted in the dramatic representations of real life situations through the lens of the abstract. There is an abundance of academic journals which discuss the psychological, social and cultural implications of gaming, however, virtual art in the museum is not really investigated from this angle. The convergence of art and technology continues to challenge the very notion of how art is produced – the integration of virtual reality into immersion should not lead us to disregard computer aesthetics, it should, however, emphasize what is regarded as a crucial museum aesthetic.



[21] *Digital Performance,* 603

Hito Steyerl, *Factory of the Sun,* installation view, 2016 at MOCA Grand Avenue, courtesy of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, photo by Justin Lubliner

Virtual art's plurality means that entirely new dialectics have been generated. Professor, Joshua Meyrowitz 'highlights how the relationship between the social experience (of the art user) and the physical space (its social construction and symbolic organization) produces different group identities and different stages of socialization and levels of authority.[22]' A struggle in maintaining a sense of place is clearly roused by this medium, however, if we direct our focus towards the physical site rather than the work itself, perhaps more sense can be made of this complex dialogue. Drawing our attention to the physical art object, a painting for example, space is clarified not only by the painting but also by the site in which it hangs. But where does the spectator come into all of this? Well, according to Brian O'Doherty, the spectator 'is born out of the picture

[22] Massimo Negrotti, *Yearbook of the Artificial. Vol. 3: Nature, Culture & Technology- Cultural Dimensions of the User,* (Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2005), 228

immediately to inquire it… drawn back repeatedly to contemplate it[23].' Now I know this is a clichéd insight into the motions of the spectator, nevertheless, what we can take from this is the idea that we have formed a set of practices that outline the conventional art viewing process. Having had a great deal of museum and gallery experiences myself, I know that even these traditional practices have become increasingly convoluted now that we cannot help but thrust the camera of our IPhones in the space between the work and oneself. With this in mind, perhaps we ourselves are to blame for adding these cybernetic layers to otherwise material objects.

Museumgoers snapping photos of Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night*, 1889, at MoMA.

Internet Interactions

An interesting factor to consider is the nature of our online relationships and how this translates into our everyday lives. The phenomenon of online communication continues to increase in its appeal, but why? Perhaps at the crux of this is the perceived anonymity that the Internet provides and our ability to fashion our own online presence. We, as operators of the Internet, are inundated

[23]Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (University of California press, 2000), 39

with a plethora of contexts that we are expected to navigate on a daily basis. Theorist Mark Hanson, suggests that 'the notion of identity extending into different planes of reality - a 'mixed reality' – is not necessarily new, however the empirical concreteness of this 'mixed reality is, in fact, a recent phenomenon[24].' The digital has not fully supplanted reality, however, we have somehow become natives of these two separate spheres simultaneously and it has become a space where human relationships have become highly complex. Writer, Gene Mchugh, uses the phenomena of online dating to elucidate the perplexities that have been roused by our online interactions. The lack of physical contact enables the individuals involved to engage in an interaction fuelled with 'symbolic posturing[25]' – it is bizarre to think that we are now able to demonstrate affection without the necessity of face-to-face contact; we can explore genuine human content through a digital means. One can get so wrapped up by their online world that it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the offline from the online. It is possible that one could perceive their identity as a shared article in both domains, especially due to the overlap in our tendency to express ourselves correspondingly in both spheres. There is, however, another side to this interface; our ability to remain anonymous gives individuals the opportunity to engage in fictitious encounters. In a similar manner to *Videoplace,* which manifests a fantasy clone, the Internet has provided us with a platform in which we can exhort our alter ego. This gives online communication a dual-identity, one that mimics reality and one that seeks to escape it. This terrain of conflicts

[24] *Digital Performance,* 250
[25] *You Are Here, Art After The Internet*, 30

and varying interests highlights that the ramifications of the Internet can be realised in real life.

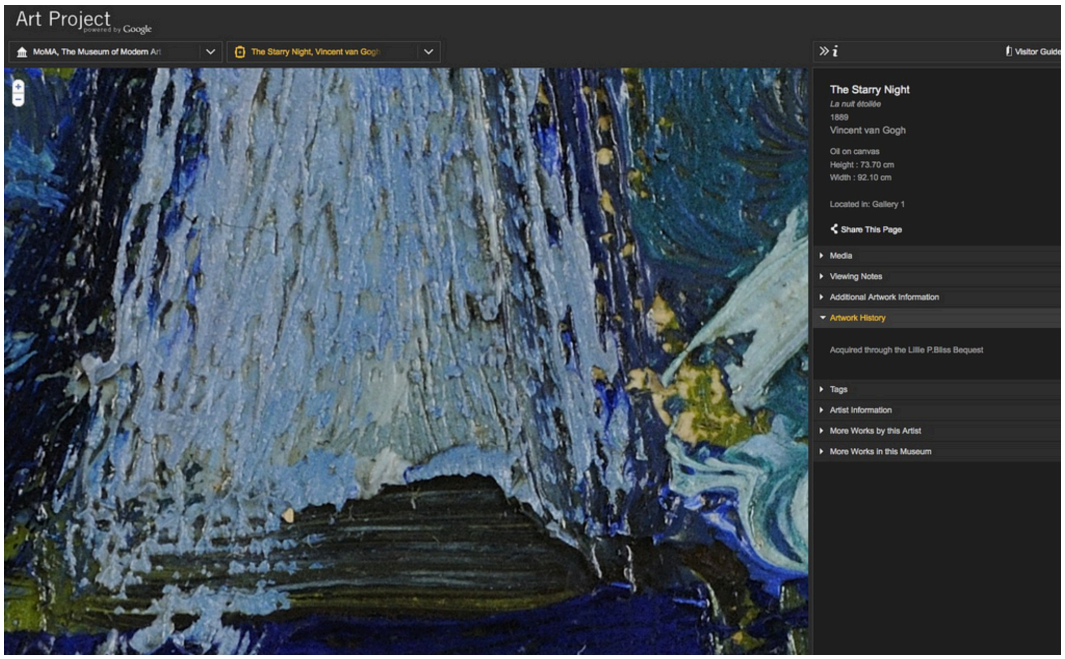
Virtual Platforms

The Google Art Project was launched in 2011 and is a unique collaboration with over 250 of the world's most renowned art institutions. This online platform features more than thirty thousand works from over 6,000 artists using high-resolution imagery. Art Project implements the same technology as Google Street View, allowing 360-degree tours of individual galleries. Today over sixty museums can be seen using this indoor viewing tool and numbers will surely increase over time[26]. The main reason this project was started was to enable heightened accessibility. Although the intentions of the platform are to supplement the museum experience, not replicate it, one cannot deny that this means of technology has ensured art viewing can now be done from the comfort of our own home. Current technologies have positioned art into the everyday, readily available outside of the gallery space.

Google Art Project and other related platforms seem to aspire to the creation of real space as opposed to the 'platform-native functionality of the web[27].' Surely such sites are anxiety inducing for art world professionals who are giving up their curatorial credibility to the web. The online space's desire to maintain the art world's sociological state has resulted in an attempt to masquerade reality. Whilst Google Art Project strives to break down the difference between viewing

[26] "Art Project," Cultural Institute, accessed November 21, 2016 https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/about/artproject/
[27] *You Are Here, Art After The Internet*, 81

a reproduction and seeing it in the flesh, they may also be encouraging our own inactivity in the meantime. That certainly isn't the goal, but I cannot help but think this outcome will escalate in its accuracy. Omar Kholeif, Editor of the book '*You Are Here, Art After the Internet',* poses the question 'will Contemporary art soon be downloadable through the iTunes Store and available as iPad screensavers, akin to album art?[28]' Considering arts online strides, this playful enquiry may very well be a natural next step. Is it a stretch to suggest that art museums are doomed to becoming extinct? Perhaps this question is somewhat overdramatized, nevertheless, the Internet renders existing art forms with an entirely new sensibility and perception. The fetish value of visibility may deplete as a consequence of these platforms and we might imagine another form of value defined by velocity. This new value based on other (virtual) qualities will continue to encourage a move away from materiality, and the dematerialization of the art object will likely extend to the realm of physical space.



Screenshot taken from Google Art Project, detail of *The Starry Night* (Vincent van Gogh)

[28] *You Are Here, Art After The Internet*, 85

Public VS Private

'The Web radically modifies public and private spaces and times – and deeply alters public-private relationships. This technological framework became a new public space and a new public time - with the growing danger to be privatized[29].'

- Bernard Stiegler

It is difficult to determine whether the Internet resides in the public or the private domain – this stems from the conflicts that are borne from the structure of social space. The space of the Internet is continuously managed and negotiated. It has become a site in which we frequently encounter social and political differences - this can make it exceedingly tricky to categorize. Because of these subjective encounters, the Internet has formed an artificial ecosystem that is populated like the real world. Since the Web is a human construct, it is fuelled with elements of the human condition. Feelings and emotions have subsequently accumulated inside this electronic space. The environment honors the private needs of the individual as well as the collective needs of all of its users. By nature, the Internet is not public at all; nevertheless, the Web's escape from finite categorization may explain our anxiety surrounding the risk of public speculation and intrusion. Because the boundaries of the domain are so unclear, we often fear that people may trespass on our virtual property. The Internet's relative levels of privacy protection may be haplessly diminished when

[29] *You Are Here, Art After The Internet*, 130

traditional media is transformed into experiential media. Perhaps virtual reality is the perfect medium for the voyeur.

In order to grasp these convoluted ideas, we would need a comprehensive understanding of the notion of public space in relation to artistic practices. "Art in the public space" tends to refer to art in combination with an artistic urban outfitting or art that provokes public interest ("social interventionism" and "community art".)[30] This suggests that public art is dependent on some of the same concepts that are implied within the realm of public space. If space is not pre-existent and seeks construction, then ultimately, public art is a measure of the space in which it situates itself in, be it the social space or the political one.

Inversions of Inside and Outside

'Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains … Philosophers, when confronted with outside and inside, think in terms of being and non-being.[31]'

- Gaston Bachelard

Some would say that the digitization of museums that has stemmed from platforms such as the Google Art Project makes for a highly impersonal experience. Others would disagree; the up-close detail that is achievable exceeds

[30] "Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s). Some basic observations on the difficult relation of public art, urbanism and political theory," Transversal Texts, accessed November 10, 2016 http://eipcp.net/transversal/0102/marchart/en
[31] *The Poetics of Space,* 212

the boundaries of contact that one could accomplish behind the in-museum wire barriers and alarm systems. Dismissing the projects desire to supplement real life experiences, I think that at the heart of this debate is our ability to engage with the outside world from the comfort of our own home. I could take a virtual trip to Stonehenge whilst lounging in bed – the concept is so mystifying that I don't believe we ever really stop to think about its implications. This example very simplistically demonstrates an obvious inversion of inside and outside; moreover, it could be equated to copious technological systems that promote similar transpositions.

Jeffrey Shaw's work, *The Legible City* (1989), invites visitors to ride a stationary bicycle through a simulated city made up of three-dimensional letters. The work utilized ground plans from Amsterdam, Karlsruhe and Manhattan and the on-screen graphics replace pre-existing architecture with words and sentences. The viewer is able to manipulate their own journey using the handlebar and pedals of the bicycle - and in this sense, 'The physical effort of cycling in the real world is gratuitously transposed into the virtual environment, affirming a conjunction of the active body in the virtual domain.[32]' The accounts used to comprise each city have a specific letter color so that the cyclist is able to follow any of the three narratives.

When Philosophers are confronted with inside and outside they tend to think in terms 'of being and non-being.[33]' *The Legible City* certainly resonates with these

[32]"The Legible City," Jeffrey Shaw, accessed November 4, 2016 http://www.jeffrey-shaw.net/html_main/show_work.php?record_id=83#
[33] *The Poetics of Space,* 212

blurred dialectics, and although the imagery used within this work does not govern an explicit metaphorical domain, it poses as an early exemplar of virtual art that is able to transcend place and site. Due to our affinity for the virtual realm, many seek ways in which they can transpose outdoor activities such as cycling, golfing and tennis into a digital pursuit. This extremity of video gaming is perhaps where psychological concerns begin to kick in. If we pluck the core concept from *The Legible City* and remove it from the confines of the museum, then our manual dexterity, which usually constitutes a traditional form of exercise, bears action unto an electronic journey that attempts to mimic reality. Despite the negative effects of our incessant need to drag entertainment into the digital sphere, there are of course profound positive outcomes in the area of virtual leisure and sports-oriented technologies. These environments may be useful in providing individuals with intellectual or physical disabilities to develop independent behavioral patterns and enjoy otherwise unfeasible pastimes within a safe environment. Benefits aside, these practices only enhance our inability to form definitive intuitions and it is incredibly unsettling to think that we can metaphorically be both inside and outside at the same time. Bachelard states, 'in any case, inside and outside, as experienced by the imagination can no longer be taken in their simple reciprocity; consequently, by choosing more concrete, more phenomenologically exact inceptions, we shall come to realize that the dialectics of inside and outside multiply with countless diversified nuances.[34]' This emphasizes the innate reversibility of inside and outside - intimate spaces lose their clarity whilst exterior spaces loose their sense of void.

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[34] *The Poetics of Space,* 216

Jeffrey Shaw, *The Legible City,* 1989, Nagoya Japan.
Software: Gideon May and Lothar Schmitt
Hardware: Charly Jungbauer and Huib Nelissen

City Tee Time: an office space converted into an indoor golf simulation lounge.

Where's Space Heading?

The condition of the space of art is, and will continue to be, an incredibly relevant topic. Technology will continue to progress, like it always has done, therefore a constant mapping of our spatial context is required in order to ensure the validity of this complicated matter long into the future. The virtual world continues to overlap with the real one – further weakening of the boundary between the two domains is inevitable and I cannot help but find this somewhat alarming. At some point, the establishment of law within the virtual sphere may have to be taken into further consideration - online enforcement has always been considered somewhat problematic, and as aforementioned, the policing of our personal navigation of this space will be a disconcerting concept for the majority.

Due to virtual arts infinite reproducibility, value is incredibly difficult to construct. Looking at this medium strictly from an art world perspective, is there a market for this kind of work? This burning question leads me to believe that the physicality of art isn't something that is going to be so readily dismissed, especially when auction results continue to suggest an undeniable investment in a work's materiality. Lippard's argument concerning "the dematerialization of the art object" never exonerated the object entirely; space will most likely take on a similar path. The gradual disintegration of space both in art and in general is probable, but harping back to my original question: will the development of virtual spaces render the physicality of art as obsolete? I do not see the space of art disappearing any time soon.

In space, what came earlier tends to underpin what follows. Social space seeks to reassemble disciplines of history, sociology, human geography and so on - space's organic constitution manifests relationships between society and nature. My exploration has, at times, illustrated a rather negative undercurrent. For me, this is linked to the concern that the virtual medium is abused by society in order to live vicariously through it. The phenomenon of virtual reality has encouraged the rise of the anti-physical culture and the complex nature of the virtual world suggests that speculation and the medium go hand in hand. The uncertainty regarding space's future is a reflection of the notion itself as well as the precarious nature of its virtual paradigm. If real space drifts into cyberspace, the philosophical ideas that ground much of every day spatial concerns may be considered inadequate. If virtual space is abstract and real space is absolute then how are we ever expected to establish these as specific sites that are supposedly distinct from others. The solution is unclear… but I will give you some space to dwell on this.

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